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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Key Points in Comments of Dr. Hamid Algar and Dr. Thomas Ricks on Iran's Islamic Revolution and American Policy, at the Congressional Research Conference, 8 February 1980.

The comments by Dr. Algar of Berkeley and Dr. Ricks of Georgetown provide insight into the thinking of Iran's present leadership. Algar is a scholar of Iranian Shiism, a convert to Islam, and a strong supporter of Ayatollah Khomeini. He interviewed Khomeini two months ago. Ricks, a historian, has also recently travelled to Iran. Ricks supports the revolution, but like Bani-Sadr and other secular Iranian leaders he is apparently wary of political domination by the clergy. (C)

Algar commented on the history of clerical opposition to what Shiites have long perceived as an inseparable combination of internal tyranny and foreign domination in Iran. Algar's remarks suggest several conclusions:

- For Iran's Islamic revolutionaries and their followers, US support for the Shah is continuous with the foreign meddling in Iran which began in the 19th century. The US advanced its interests through the Shah while ignoring the establishment of a police state. Similarly, the British and Russians had furthered the corruption and misrule of Iran's 19th century shahs by concentrating only on their own gain. Iran is undergoing what is in effect an anti-colonial revolution. That revolution is led now, as it was in the past, by the clergy. (C)
- It is self-deception to believe that Iran might ally itself with the US for any reason. An alliance now would be equivalent to returning to "colonial" status. Secondly, we should not underestimate the depth of

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the hatred felt for the US Government and the CIA for complicity in the repressive measures taken by the Shah. The Shia theme of martyrdom at the hands of a tyrant gives great emotional force to the accounts of SAVAK brutality. (C)

--The legitimacy of Iran's new institutions is provided by Islam. The Shah's secular institutions advanced western values and promoted foreign interests. The institutions of the Islamic Republic, by contrast, reflect Iran's Islamic values and will advance the interests of the common people of Iran. The US can "accept" Iran's Islamic revolution only by denying the legitimacy of the Shah's regime and condemning itself for having supported him. (C)

Dr. Algar implied that the Islamic opposition to the Iranian monarchy has been more or less unified from its inception. He acknowledged that some clerical leaders had been politically inactive, but concluded that the revolution now has a sound basis for unity in "Islamic modernism." He defined the modernist movement as the process of applying Islamic concepts to modern problems. After World War II Mehdi Bazargan had started the movement in the universities, while Ayatollah Talaqani had spread its basic ideas to the mosques. A key intellectual leader of the movement was Ali Shariati. (C)

The comments on Dr. Algar's remarks by an Iranian religious scholar, Dr. Mehdi Haeri, suggest that Algar overestimates the degree of unity among the Islamic revolutionaries. Haeri's comments implied that Islamic modernism is still suspect among many traditionalist Iranian clerics. Haeri noted that modernism, or developing religious thought in response to change, was inherent in traditional Islam. He claimed that the real question lies in defining what is legitimate change, not in drawing distinctions between traditional and modernist Islam. (C)

Dr. Ricks' comments suggest another potential source of conflict among the Islamic revolutionaries. Approaching the issues from further to the left, Ricks noted that:

--The revolution created a movement that was far from monolithic. Ricks noted that there were more than 3,000 political and vocational organizations now advancing their views in 120-130 newspapers. (C)

--The revolution is broadly based and directed toward the equal distribution of wealth. While Ricks, like Algar, strongly supports Khomeini and refers to him as "the Iman," Ricks is careful to point out that the revolution did not create a new form of elitism based on the clergy. (C)

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Ricks' views appear to be closer to those of Bani-Sadr and other Islamic revolutionaries who are not themselves members of the clergy. Ricks did not name the members of this presumably diverse group, but it probably includes some of Bani-Sadr's associates such as Central Bank Director Nobari, as well as non-clerical members of the Islamic Republic Party such as Habibi, Ayat, and others. Ricks did differentiate this group from the moderate reformers--former Prime Minister Bazargan and his associates in the Liberation Movement of Iran--whom he regards as having failed. (C)

Ricks raised a number of issues which will probably continue to be sources of conflict among the diverse elements of the Iranian revolutionary coalition:

- the extent to which the Shiite clergy should be actively involved in the formal structures of government;
- the degree of centralization of political and economic decision-making;
- the extent to which democratic freedoms are ensured in Iran.

Ricks did not expand on any of these points and was careful to avoid criticism of Khomeini or the Islamic Republic. In raising the issue of democratic freedoms, however, Ricks may have been alluding to the repressive measures taken against leftist groups such as the Mujahedin guerrilla group since the revolution. (C)